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ABSTRACT

People who aspire to the principalship may be unaware of some demands of the job. This paper offers some advice to those considering such a career move. It describes the realities involved in interacting with parents, students, teachers, and the central office. Aspiring principals are advised to enroll in a field-based preparation program to experience the broader administrative perspective and to examine the nature of their motivation. Sincere motivation, perseverance, and personal identification with the school mission are needed to overcome the difficulties of school administration. (LMI)

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IS THE PRINCIPALSHIP FOR YOU??

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IS THE PRINCIPALSHIP FOR YOU??

Every day people enter graduate college preparation programs for school administrators. They do this for a variety of reasons. Some feel they can make a difference in the school. They want to create change and feel being the principal is the way to do it. Others, regretfully, may feel burnt out in the classroom and are looking for another outlet within education. Still others may have a penchant to be the "boss," the one in charge. Some do it for the increased pay. Then, if everyone was truly honest, there would be some who do it for what they perceive as a different image.

You may be thinking about entering the principalship too. If so, here are a few things you need to know and consider ahead of time. Think strongly on them, reflect on them, then if you are still interested in becoming a principal seek out the mentorship of a good one. Work with a good university to help you develop an individualized field-based program where you can experience both the joys and heartaches of the daily walk in the principalship. Then and only then will you really know if the principalship is for you.

For while you are still a classroom teacher there is no way that you can truly have an accurate perception of what it is really like to run a school. You have not had the opportunity to share a passion for a building and what it can become. You may have watched principals and thought, "Gee, I can do that," or, "That doesn't look so difficult. I could do it in my sleep," or, you may think, "What's the big deal? The principal doesn't have to

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control thirty students in one room at the same time, much less teach them anything, or worse yet, be held accountable for it!"

So, what is the big deal?

You must learn to be able to see the leadership of the school from a global perspective. In order to do that you must have the opportunity to walk-the-walk and match-the-talk. That's why field-based preparation programs are so important. Until then, as Smokey Robinson, Ray DePaul, and Confederate Railroad croon, "You don't know what it's like!"

And you could not.

There is no way pre-service administrators can see the total picture of running a school until they have done it. Colleges and universities as well as school districts and individuals are seeing this. Field-based preparation programs are expanding rapidly, seeking to blend theory with practice. They know there is no way pre-service administrators can experience the stress, the tension, the uncertainty, the ambiguity, the joys, the small triumphs, or the successes until they have had the opportunity to assume responsibility and LEAD! Field-based programs give pre-service administrators the time as well as the opportunity to learn about the total Gestalt of campus administration.

As a potential administrator are on the outside looking in, there are several problem areas that you may fail to see. Because you have probably had a successful experience in the classroom, it could be difficult for you to experience the difficulties and frustrations some of your peers may be experiencing with

instruction or classroom management. You must have the opportunity to develop the concept of what it is like to be the one person in charge of the building that must see the total picture. The principal is the one person ultimately responsible for everything that goes on within a campus. The buck stops here. And every campus, no matter how good it is, still has problems. Sit back now and let's look at some.

Teachers can act like children. Often they do not listen or follow directions. They are often the first to complain, and the last to compliment. They want the students to behave and to score well on standardized tests, but often the very ones complaining are the ones spending their conference time as "Lounge Lizards" discussing ways they (inadvertently, of course) are "Kid Killers." Too often some teachers simply don't like teaching or students...and it shows. Regretfully, most campuses have some teachers who fit this unbecoming picture.

It becomes the problem of the principal to turn things around, to answer parental complaints, to smooth things over, and hopefully to change the attitude of these teachers. This is no small task. Chronic grumblers are usually unhappy people to begin with. It goes beyond the basic scope of the principalship to change a teacher's outlook on life. So the principal assumes the role of amateur psychologist, without nearly enough counseling training, of course. The best part is, the principal expects to be successful!

Thankfully, there are many more teachers who would do anything to help a student learn. They will come early and stay late to

meet and work individually with students. There are teachers who truly care about their learners and who make the time in and outside of the school day to be the role models and listeners for kids who may not have any other adult who listens or cares. There are teachers who fret daily over students who do not have all the opportunities or supports necessary for success in school. These are the teachers sincerely searching for alternative ways to modify instruction, to see through facades, to help beginning teachers, and who make the school a nurturing place to be in. Their value cannot be under emphasized. *The success or failure of a school depends on the quality and dedication of its' teachers.* Fortunately, we are blessed with so many who do make our schools good places to be. They also warm the heart of the principal!

Then there are the students. Some students are a real trial to even the saintliest of teachers. They are always a problem. No matter what they are supposed to be doing, they are doing something else...or nothing at all. But, if the students were not there, neither would anyone else be! That does include all the students...

Teachers complain that these students are disobedient at best. They do not respect authority. They create discipline problems both in and out of the classroom setting. Too many students lack motivation. They do not care how they act or what, if anything, they learn. What they really need is an attitude adjustment. These students continually try the hearts and patience of their principals, particularly when they often are blessed with so much

potential.

On the other hand, thankfully, most students are still motivated to learn. They have a decent attitude. They want to be challenged. They have an intrinsic love for learning. Well, maybe it is extrinsic...built around a need for good grades to please their parents or for entrance to the college of their choice. Regardless, they are learning! Most students, if given the opportunity, want to be contributors both to their school and to their community. They are young leaders. These are the students who make all the problems the others create worth sticking it out for. These are the ones that keep us coming back each day. For them, everything else is worthwhile. These are the students that delight our souls - especially when we are tired completely to our bones!

We've discussed students and teachers. What about parents? Most, of course, are wonderful. They are supportive and interested. They would move Heaven and earth to help their child succeed. Then there are parents that you are sure need to be locked up. If they do not have a criminal record you know that it is either a matter of time or it just has not happened...yet. These parents, remarkably, have similar problems as their off-a-beat offspring. They too have a problem with disrespect. Usually they view anyone in a position of authority with quasi-contempt. Professional educators represent the "Establishment" so they make an easy target. Instead of accepting responsibility for their son or daughters' difficulties and seeking to work together to solve

them, these parents either:

- A) assume no responsibility or concern whatsoever
- B) are aggressively defiant
- C) are antagonistic to all concerned
- D) claim everything is somebody else's fault.

Their child would never do anything wrong on his own. Who really committed the offense, they want to know, and what is the school going to do about it?

What a group.

Could someone please form and advertise a group called Parenting Skills Anonymous?

Which makes us ever so thankful and grateful for the large percentage of parents who are truly concerned with their children. They want them to learn. They want them to be respectful. In essence, they want them to grow up to be productive, contributing citizens. These parents give their children support at home. They provide guidance and modeling in the ways to live cooperatively in life.

These are also the parents who support the school. If their child has a problem, Mom and Dad are on the telephone, up at the school immediately, or both. Their walk does match their talk. They want to work with the school. They become involved in their child's education and development. They participate actively in site based decision making. They are willing to take a stand for what is right both for their own children and, philosophically, for the entire school. Furthermore, they tell their friends in the

community what a good job their school is doing with their young people.

What a group of parents indeed! What the world needs is more of them!

So, what other problems could a principal encounter if she has her teachers, students, and parents under control?

Has anyone talked to you lately about the Central Office???

First, let's say that there are Central Offices and then there are Central Offices. Some Central Offices are extremely supportive. They actively encourage site based planning and decision making. They work hard to help campuses have the necessary resources to meet goals and objectives. They provide solid training and staff development. They do a good job letting the public know about successes both of the whole district and of individual students and campuses. Their philosophy is, when one does well, it makes everyone look good. Everyone gets to celebrate mutual success! There is an open, collegial relationship between these Central Offices and the schools they serve. Their reputation in the community also reflects this.

Then, there are the other Central Offices. In these Central Offices, which exist too often, praise is seldom heard. Campuses achieving their goals are not celebrated. Under achieving campuses are not nurtured. They are chastised and threatened. There is an air of secrecy over planning and policy making. Orders and directives are given without campus or community input. There is no accountability from within. And far be it for the progressive

principal to ask why a decision has been made. After the scowl, the response and attitude can be, "Because we said so," "What makes you want to rock the boat???" or, "We were doing great before you came along. What makes you think we need your input?" The poor beguiled principal surely won't ask again.

So much for collegial relationships.

After all this, why would anyone knowingly and willingly go back to college, take graduate hours, obtain another degree, and in many states, take a difficult state certification examination, when there are so many heartaches?

Because you have to really, really want it. You have to get tough, but keep the vision. You have to have a passion for excellence and for your school. You must see beyond the forest for the individual trees, i.e. student success. You must internalize your building and make it a part of yourself. Your school mission becomes your mission. What is said or done in your building becomes a direct reflection of your leadership, whether that is good or bad.

Administration equals taking a big risk.

The sustenance for this kind of success must come from within yourself. Motivation and drive must come from your heart. You must search deep within yourself to see if you have the strength of character and the perseverance to fight the continuing saga of daily battles, to lead your campus in a positive manner, and even when the turkeys get you down, to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again. Even the Bible says we must never

grow weary with doing what is right or good, even when it is hard. Our reward in the end will be knowing we have done all we can do.

If you can not do this, if you can not face the adversities without letting them eat you up, then it is time to reassess your goals, to look another direction for your future. For the ones that take the big step and come on into administration: Congratulations! You will find wonderful rewards as well as challenges. Even with the difficult times, the successes will come in greater quality and quantity than you ever dreamed possible. You will know what it is like to be a school administrator.

You will be one.

Then someday, if you are really lucky, you will be the role model. You will be able to pass your passion as well as your mission on to someone else who only hopes to know what it is like!

This article is lovingly dedicated to the past, present, and future graduate students in the Educational Administration programs of the University of Texas at Arlington and Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.